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HAS CHRISTIANITY BENEFITED WOMAN?

THE assertion that woman owes all the advantages of her present position to the Christian church, has been repeated so often, that it is accepted as an established truth by those who would be unwilling to admit that all the injustice and degradation she has suffered might be logically traced to the same source. A consideration of woman's position before Christianity, under Christianity, and at the present time, shows that she is not indebted to any form of religion for one step of progress, or one new liberty; on the contrary, it has been through the perversion of her religious sentiments that she has been so long held in a condition of slavery. All religions thus far have taught the headship and superiority of man, the inferiority and subordination of woman. Whatever new dignity, honor, and self-respect the changing theologies may have brought to man, they have all alike brought to woman but another form of humiliation. History shows that the condition of woman has changed with different forms of civilization, and that she has enjoyed in some periods greater honor and dignity and more personal and property rights than have been accorded her in the Christian era. History shows, too, that the moral degradation of

woman is due more to theological superstitions than to all other influences together. It is not to any form of religion that we are to look for woman's advancement, but to material civilization, to commerce, science, art, invention, to the discovery of the art of printing, and the general dissemination of knowledge. Buckle, in his "*History of Civilization*," calls attention to the fact that when woman became valuable in a commercial sense, in proportion as she secured material elevation and wealth through her property rights, she began to be treated with a deference and respect that the Christian church never accorded. In ancient Egypt, at the most brilliant period of its history, woman sat upon the throne and directed the civilization of the country. In the marriage relation she was supreme in all things—a rule that, according to Wilkinson, was productive of lasting fidelity. As priestess she performed the most holy offices of religion, and to her is traced the foundation of Egyptian literature, the sacred songs of Isis, said by Plato to be ten thousand years old. Colleges for women were founded there twelve hundred years before Christ, and the medical profession was in the hands of women. It is a sad commentary on the Christianity of England and America, to find professors in medical colleges of the nineteenth century less liberal than those in the earliest civilizations. In 1876 four professors in the College of Surgeons in London resigned because three women were licensed for the practice of midwifery, and the whole Royal College of Physicians thanked them for it. In 1869 the professors in the University of Edinburgh refused to teach four highly respectable women that had matriculated, and the students, echoing the contempt of their teachers, mobbed them. Nor did the conduct of American students, when women were admitted to the clinics of the Pennsylvania and New York hospitals, reflect greater credit on American manhood.

All Pagandom recognized a female priesthood, believing that national safety depended on them. Sybils wrote the books of Fate, and oracles where women presided were consulted by many nations. The pages of Roman history are gilded with the honor shown to women, and the civil laws for wives and mothers were more liberal in some respects than those in Christian countries have ever been. The rights of property that were willingly secured to women by ancient Roman law, were wrung out of the English Government by the persistent efforts of women themselves, only three years ago. Among the Germanic

nations woman was treated with marked respect. Tacitus gives us many striking pictures of the equal privileges of the men and women, of their mutual love and confidence, and their lofty virtue; the dignity of the German bride and the marriage ceremony, and the significance of the wedding presents. Their marriage bond was strict and severe, alike for men and women. Almost alone among barbaric nations, they preserved monogamic relations. "In all things," says Tacitus, "they consulted their women," who, with strong muscular bodies, possessed clear, vigorous minds; and though, as in all warlike tribes, they performed the agricultural labor, yet they preserved their health and beauty to a great age, because they were respected and honored by their men, who were chaste and temperate in all things; and they enjoyed the inspiration of liberty and love in their daily toil.

The German scholar Curtius says, "The native selfishness of man has been the great power against which moralists, philosophers, and teachers have had to contend." What sooner dissipates this than a deep affection for a noble woman? No love is so all-absorbing, so enduring, or gives such satisfaction to this mortal life; no power can so exalt and quicken civilization. It was this that elevated the Germanic tribes, and infused the poetic sentiment into their earliest literature. It is only in countries where Germanic ideas have taken root, that we see marks of any elevation of woman superior to that of Pagan antiquity; and as the condition of the German woman in her deepest paganism was so striking as to challenge the attention of Tacitus and his contemporaries, it is highly unreasonable to claim it as an achievement of Christianity. In fact, the Christian doctrine of marriage, as propounded by Paul, does not dignify woman as does that which German soundness of heart established at an early day. F. W. Newman, brother of the cardinal, one of the leading authorities on ecclesiastical subjects, says:

"With Paul, the sole reason for marriage is, that a man may gratify instinct without sin. He teaches that, but for this object, it would be better not to marry. He wishes that all in this respect were as free as himself, and calls it a special gift from God. He does not encourage a man to desire a mutual soul-union intimately to share his griefs and joys, one in whom the confiding heart can repose, whose smile shall reward and soften toil, whose voice shall beguile sorrow. He does not seem aware that the fascinations of woman refine and chasten society; that virtuous attachment has in it an element of respect which abashes and purifies, and which shields the soul

even when marriage is deferred ; nor yet, that the union of two persons who have no previous affection can seldom yield the highest fruit of matrimony, but often leads to the severest temptations. How should he know all this ? Courtship before marriage did not exist in the society open to him, hence he treats the propriety of giving away a maiden as one in which her conscience, her likes and dislikes, are not concerned. (1 Cor. vii. 37, 38.) As a result of the Apostolic doctrines, in the second, third, and following centuries, very gross views concerning the relations of the sexes prevailed ; and they have been everywhere transmitted where men's morality is exclusively formed from the New Testament, viz., in the Armenian, Syrian, and Greek churches, and in the Romish church, in exact proportion as Germanic and poetical influences have been repressed ; that is, in proportion as the hereditary Christian doctrine has been kept pure from modern innovations. The marriage service of the Church of England, which incorporates the Pauline doctrine, is felt by English brides and bridegrooms to contain what is so offensive and degrading, that many clergymen mercifully make lawful omissions. The old Roman matron was morally as high as in modern Italy ; nor is there any ground for supposing that modern women have advantage over the ancient in Spain and Portugal, where Germanic have been counteracted by Moorish influences. The relative position of the sexes in Homeric Greece exhibits nothing materially different from the present day. In Armenia and Syria perhaps Christianity has done the service of extinguishing polygamy ; this is creditable, though nowise remarkable, as Judaism, also, in time unlearned polygamy, and made an unbidden improvement on Moses."

Rev. William Ellery Channing, in his essay on Milton's character and writings, says :

"There is no prohibition of polygamy in the New Testament. It is an indisputable fact that, although Christianity was first preached in Asia, which had been from the earliest ages the seat of polygamy, the apostles never denounced it as a crime, and never required their converts to put away all wives but one."

Hence, we cannot credit Christianity with woman's elevation from the degradation of polygamy, especially as it exists under our own government to-day, in the Territory of Utah and elsewhere, and concubinage is recognized by statute law in some of the Southern States. The historian Hallam says in his "*History of Literature*" :

"Love, with the ancient poets, is often tender, sometimes virtuous, but never accompanied by a sense of deference or inferiority. This elevation of the female sex through the voluntary submission of the stronger is a remarkable fact in the philosophical history of Europe. It originated partially in the Teutonic manners. Some have said 'the reverence and adoration of the female sex which has descended to our own times, is the offspring of the Christian dispensation.' But until it can be shown that Christianity estab-

lishes any such principle, we must look a little farther down for its origin. . . . Without rejecting the Teutonic influence, we might ascribe more direct efficacy to the favor shown towards women in succession to lands, through inheritance or dower, by the later Roman law."

Gallantry, in the sense of a general homage to the fair, a respectful deference to woman, independent of personal attachment, first became a perceptible element of European manners in the south of France at the end of the tenth century. This spirit is not found in the ancient poetry of the Franks or Anglo-Saxons, but it is fully developed in the sentiments and usages of northern France. Gallantry toward women was practiced by the Goths before they were acquainted with Christianity. Catholicism has greatly diminished the political and priestly powers of women.* It would seem, then, that the authorities are against the proposition that the moral elevation of woman-kind is due to Christianity, and tell us that it is due to altogether different causes, among which we find early Germanic influences and the modern literature of Germany, containing pure and noble views of love; ancient customs, giving woman property rights, and favors shown to woman by later Roman law; French influence; gallantry; the springing up of home life in the dark ages. The brave words and deeds of reformers in every generation, proclaiming the principles of justice and equality for all humanity, must be recognized as one of the essential factors in the civilization in which woman has had a share. With regard to intellectual growth and elevation, we have the same causes alike for man and woman. What either acquired was in opposition to the church, which sedulously tried to keep all learning within itself. Man, seeking after knowledge, was opposed by the church; woman, by both church and man. Educated men in our own day, who have outgrown many of the popular theological superstitions, do not share with the women of their households the freedom they themselves enjoy. Hence, it is not unusual to find the wives of clergymen far more bigoted than their husbands. Among the Greeks there was a class of women that possessed absolute freedom, surrounded by the wisest men of their day. They devoted themselves to study and thought, which enabled them to add to their other charms an intense intellectual fascination, and to make themselves the center of a literary society of matchless splendor. Aspasia was as famous

* See Comte, "Philosophie Positive," Vol. V., pp. 221-223.

for her genius as for her beauty. She is said to have composed many of Pericles's most famous orations, and inspired his loftiest flights of eloquence. Socrates, too, owned his deep obligations to Diotema. In the society of this remarkable type of Grecian womanhood the most brilliant artists, poets, historians, and philosophers found their highest inspiration. True, the position of these women was questionable; but as they were the only class to whom learning and liberty were permitted, they illustrate the civilization of the period.

The question is pertinent, Does the same class in Christian civilization enjoy as high culture and equal governmental protection? Since English and American statesmen, by recent legislation, have proved that they consider this phase of social life a necessity, why do not the Church and the State throw some shield of protection over the class of whom Lecky, in his "History of Morals," speaks so tenderly? What has Christianity done for this type of womanhood? Have eighteen centuries of its influence mitigated the miseries of this phase of life one iota? No, nor ever will, until the mother of the race is recognized as equal in every position in life, honored and dignified at every altar; not until another revision of the Protestant Bible shall strike from its pages all invidious distinctions based on sex. The masculine and feminine elements of humanity, in exact equilibrium, are as necessary to the order and harmony of the world of morals as are the centripetal and centrifugal forces exactly balanced in the world of matter. As long as the religion of a nation teaches the subordination of woman, of the moral and spiritual elements of humanity to physical force, a pure civilization is impossible. Just as slavery in the South, with its lessons of obedience, degraded every black man in the Northern States, so does an accepted system of prostitution, with its lessons of subjection and self-sacrifice, degrade the ideal womanhood everywhere.

In harmony with the pagan worship of an ideal womanhood of sybils, oracles, and priestesses, women held prominent positions in the church for several centuries after Christ. We have proof of this in the restrictions that at a later period were placed upon them by canon laws. The Council of Laodicea, three hundred and sixty-five years after Christ, forbade the ordination of women to the ministry, and prohibited them from entering the altar. The Council of Orleans, five hundred and eleven

years after Christ, consisting of twenty-six bishops and priests, promulgated a canon that, on account of their frailty, women must be excluded from the diaconship. Nearly three hundred years later we find the Council of Paris complaining that women serve at the altar, and even give to the people the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Through these canons we have the negative proof that for centuries women preached, baptized, administered the sacrament, and filled various offices of the church; and that ecclesiastics, through prohibitory canons, annulled these rights.

In the fifth century the church fully developed the doctrine of original sin, making woman its weak and guilty author. To St. Augustine, whose early life was licentious and degraded, we are indebted for this idea, which was infused into the canon law, and was the basis of all the persecutions woman endured for centuries, in the drift of Christian opinion from the extremes of polygamy to celibacy, from the virtues of chivalry to the cruelties of witchcraft, when the church taught its devotees to shun woman as a temptation and defilement. It was this persecution, this crushing out of the feminine element in humanity, more than all other influences combined, that plunged the world into the dark ages, shadowing the slowly rolling centuries till now with woman's agonies and death, paralyzing literature, science, commerce, education, changing the features of art, the sentiments of poetry, the ethics of philosophy, from the tender, the loving, the beautiful, the grand, to the stern, the dark, the terrible. Even the paintings representing Jesus were gradually changed from the gentle, watchful shepherd to the stern, unrelenting judge. Harrowing representations of the temptation, the crucifixion, the judgment-day, the Inferno, were intensified and elaborated by Dante and Milton. Painter and poet vied with each other in their gloomy portrayals, while crafty bishops coined these crude terrors into canons, and timid, dishonest judges allowed them to throw their dark shadows over the civil law.

The influence of the church on woman's civil position was equally calamitous. A curious old black-letter volume, published in London in 1632, entitled "*The Lawes and Resolutions of Woman's Rights*," says, "The reason why women have no controul in Parliament, why they make no laws, consent to none, abrogate none, is their Original Sin." This idea is the chief block in the way of woman's advancement at this hour. It was fully set

forth by the canon law, with wearisome repetition, and when, in the fifteenth century, the sacred Scriptures were collected and first printed, the spirit of these canons and all that logically grew out of them were engrafted on its pages, making woman an afterthought in the creation, the author of sin, in collusion with the devil, sex a crime, marriage a condition of slavery for woman and defilement for man, and maternity a curse to be attended with sorrow and suffering that neither time nor knowledge could ever mitigate, a just punishment for having effected the downfall of man. And all these monstrous ideas, emanating from the bewildered brains of men in the dark ages, under an exclusively masculine religion, were declared to be the word of God, penned by writers specially inspired by his Spirit.

Just at the period when the civil code began to recognize the equality and independence of the wife in the marriage relation, the church, to which woman had reason to look for protection, either blindly or perversely gave the whole force of its power against woman's equality in the family, and in fact against her influence altogether. In chapter V. of Maine's "*Ancient Law*" we have a clear statement of the influence of canon law on the liberty of person and property that Roman women then enjoyed. Speaking of their freedom, he says:

"Christianity tended from the very first to narrow this remarkable liberty." "No society which preserves any tincture of Christian institution is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by middle Roman law." "The expositors of the canon law have deeply injured civilization." "There are many vestiges of a struggle between the secular and ecclesiastical principles, but the canon law nearly everywhere prevailed. In some of the French provinces married women of a rank below nobility, obtained all the powers of dealing with property which Roman jurisprudence had allowed, and this local law has been largely followed by the code Napoleon. The systems, however, which are least indulgent to married women are invariably those which have followed the canon law exclusively, or those which from the lateness of their contact with European civilization have never had their archaisms weeded out."

By the dishonoring of womanhood on the ground of original sin, by the dishonoring of all relations with her as carnal and unclean, the whole sex touched a depth of moral degradation that it had never known before. Rescued in a measure from the miseries of polygamy, woman was plunged into the more degrading and unnatural condition of celibacy. Out of this grew the terrible

persecutions of witchcraft,* which raged for centuries, women being its chief victims. They were hunted down by the clergy, tortured, burned, drowned, dragged into the courts, tried, and condemned, for crimes that never existed but in the minds of religious devotees. The clergy sustained witchcraft as Bible doctrine, far into the eighteenth century, until the spirit of rationalism laughed the whole thing to scorn and gave mankind a more cheerful view of life. The reformation brought no new hope to woman. The great head of the movement, while declaring the right of individual conscience and judgment above church authority, as if to warn woman that she had no share in this liberty, was wont to say, "No gown worse becomes a woman than that she should be wise." Here is the key-note to the Protestant pulpit for three centuries, and it grates harshly on our ears to-day. The Catholic Church, in its holy sisterhoods, so honored and revered, and in its worship of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, has preserved some recognition of the feminine element in its religion; but from Protestantism it is wholly eliminated. Religions like the Jewish and Christian, which make God exclusively male and man supreme, consign woman logically to the subordinate position assigned her in Mohammedism. History has perpetuated this tradition, and her subjection has existed as an invariable element in Christian civilization. It could not be otherwise, with the Godhead represented as a trinity of males. The old masters in the galleries of art have left us their ideals of the Trinity in three bearded male heads. No heavenly Mother is recognized in the Protestant world.

The present position of woman in the spirit of our creeds and codes is far behind the civilization of the age, and unworthy the representative women of this day. And now, as ever, the strongest adverse influence to her elevation comes from the church, judging from its Biblical expositions, the attitude of the clergy, and the insignificant status that woman holds in the various sectarian organizations. For nearly forty years there has been an organized movement in England and America to liberalize the laws in relation to woman, to secure a more profitable place in the world of work, to open the colleges for higher education, and the schools of medicine, law, and theology, and to give woman an equal voice in the government and re-

* See Lecky's "History of Rationalism."

ligion of the country. These demands, one by one, are slowly being conceded by the secular branch of the government, while the sectarian influence has been uniformly in the opposite direction. Appeals before legislative assemblies, constitutional conventions, and the highest courts have been respectfully heard and decided, while propositions for the consideration even of some honors to women in the church have uniformly been received with sneers and denunciations by leading denominations, who quote Scripture freely to maintain their position. Judges and statesmen have made able arguments in their respective places for woman's civil and political rights; but where shall we look for sectarian leaders that, in their general assemblies, synods, or other ecclesiastical conventions, have advocated a higher position for woman in the church? The attitude of the clergy is the same as in bygone centuries, modified somewhat, on this as on all other questions, by advancing civilization. The Methodists have a lay ministry, but they do not ordain women. Liberal clergymen in other sects have been arraigned and tried by their general assemblies for allowing women to preach in their pulpits. In imitation of the high churches in England, we have some in this country in which boys from twelve to fifteen supply the place of women in the choir, that the sacred altars may not be defiled by the inferior sex—an early Christian idea. The discourses of clergymen, when they enlarge on the condition of woman, read more like canons in the fifth century than sermons in the nineteenth, addressed to those who are their peers in religious thought and scientific attainment. The Rev. Morgan Dix's Lenten lectures last spring, and Bishop Littlejohn's last triennial sermon, are fair specimens. The latter recommends that all the liberal legislation of the past forty years for woman should be reversed, while the former is the chief obstacle in the way of woman's admission to Columbia College. And these fairly represent the sentiments of the vast majority, who never refer to the movement for woman's enfranchisement but with ridicule and contempt—sentiments that they insidiously infuse into all classes of women under their influence. None of the leading theological seminaries will admit women who are preparing for the ministry, and none of the leading denominations will ordain them when prepared. The Universalists, Unitarians, and Quakers are the only sects that ordain women. And yet women are the chief supporters of the church to-day. They

make the surplices and gowns, get up the fairs and donation-parties, and are the untiring beggars for its benefit. They supply its enthusiasm, and are continually making large bequests to its treasury; and their reward is still the echo of the old canon law of woman's subjection, from pulpit to pulpit throughout Christendom. Though England and America are the two nations in which the Christian religion is dominant, and can boast the highest type of womanhood, and the greatest number in every department of art, science, and literature, yet even here women have been compelled to clear their own way for every step in progress. Not one wrong has been righted until women themselves made organized resistance against it. In the face of every form of opposition they are throwing off the disabilities of the old common law, which Lord Brougham said long ago "was in relation to woman the opprobrium of the age and Christianity." And not until they make an organized resistance against the withering influence of the canon law, will they rid themselves of the moral disabilities growing out of the theologies of our times. When I was standing near the last resting-place of the Rev. Charles Kingsley not long ago, his warning words for woman, in a letter to John Stuart Mill, seemed like a voice from the clouds, saying with new inspiration and power, "This will never be a good world for woman until the last remnant of the canon law is civilized off the face of the earth."

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON.

NO MAN can write worthily of woman who does not approach his subject with a kind of religious reverence; and a true man will ever treat woman, both in life and in literature, not with justice merely, but with generous sympathy. Into her arms we are born, on her breast our helpless cries are hushed, and her hands close our eyes when the light is gone. Watching her lips, our own become vocal; in her eyes we read the mystery of faith, hope, and love; led by her hand, we learn to look up and to walk in the way of obedience to law. We owe to her, as mother, as sister, as wife, as friend, the tenderest emotions of life, the purest aspirations of the soul, the noblest elements of character, and the completest sympathy in all our joy and sorrow. She weaves

flowers of heaven into the vesture of earthly life. In poetry, painting, sculpture, and religion, she gives us ideals of the fair and beautiful. Innocence is a woman, chastity is a woman, charity is a woman. And yet, true as all this is, and is felt to be throughout Christendom, such views and sentiments, when considered in the light of history, seem to be little less than absurd. The poets have sung divinely of woman, but man has treated her inhumanly. At the origin of society she is everywhere a drudge, a slave, a chattel. Among the Babylonians, we know from Herodotus, it was the custom to offer women for sale to the highest bidder, and every woman was required, at least for a time, to put a price on her virtue. With the Lydians this was a universal practice. The Syrians, to the immolation of children to idols, joined the compulsory sacrifice of woman's honor. Strabo affirms that even the most distinguished families among the Armenians presented their daughters to the goddess of debauch in the temple of Anaitis; and the same writer tells us that a law of the Medes required every man to have not less than seven wives. That polygamy and infanticide were common among the Persians, is a fact to which Herodotus testifies, who also says that the Scythians were promiscuous in their relations with women, were conjugal despots, and immolated widows on the graves of their husbands. And Strabo asserts that the ancient Hindoos bought their wives, treated them as slaves, and burned them when their husbands died. Among the Mongols, community of women was consecrated both by law and custom. In Egypt, Diodorus tells us, unlimited polygamy was lawful to all except the priests; and the support of the family, by the rudest labors, and often by the sale of virtue, devolved upon woman, while the men stayed at home to nurse and knit. In Greece woman held a less degraded position. She was not the slave of her husband, but, with the exception of a certain class of public women, she was reared in ignorance and confined to the nursing of children and domestic drudgery. When her husband entertained his friends, she was not permitted to sit at table. The Grecian view of marriage is physico-political. Even in the heroic epoch of Homer, there is no trace of the sentiment of love as it is known to us. Of the many suitors of Penelope, not one seeks to render himself worthy of her love. The famous passage in which Homer describes the parting of Hector from Andromache, depicts the great hero's concern for his son, rather than

for his wife; and Andromache is embraced by Pyrrhus, the son of the slayer of her husband. Menelaus takes Helen back in complete indifference, after she had lived ten years with Paris. Telemachus rudely tells his mother to go back to her spinning-wheel, and that to speak among men belongs only to man. The husband bought his wife, and the woman taken captive was reduced to slavery and sold as a chattel. Woman's work in the Homeric period was to draw water, to wash, to grind corn, to make the fire, and to perform all the most menial and even indecent labors for men. Hesiod, who probably belongs to this period, calls women "an accursed brood, and the chief scourge of the human race." And Æschylus, at a later date, declares that woman is the direst scourge both of the state and the home. The daily prayer of Socrates was a thanksgiving to the gods that he had been born neither a slave nor a woman; and Aristotle teaches that woman is by nature the inferior of man. Plato, in his "Republic," takes a purely political view of woman, and would have the propagation of the human race made subject to the principles that guide stock-raisers in the breeding of animals. In the historical age of Greece, a slight improvement in the legal position of woman was accompanied by her social degradation. Virtuous women were kept in ignorance and seclusion, and the place of honor was given to courtesans. The companionship of Socrates and Theodota, and Plato's presence in the house of Aspasia, without even the remotest suspicion that such a state of affairs was reprehensible, make it unnecessary to use other arguments to show the ineffable degradation to which woman had been brought in the most brilliant epoch of Grecian civilization.

In the earliest days the Romans bought or captured their wives; and women were not permitted to own or inherit property. Romulus gave the husband absolute authority over the wife, even to the right of life and death. Egnacius Menecius was scarcely blamed for killing his wife, though she had been guilty of nothing more grievous than merely tasting wine. "Slacken the rein," said Cato, speaking of woman, "and you will afterward strive in vain to check the mad career of that unreasoning animal." The Romans habitually contrasted the majesty of man (*majestas virorum*) with the imbecility, frivolity, and weakness of woman (*sexus imbecillis, levis, impar laboribus*). As they drowned weak and deformed children, so they treated woman as an inferior and a slave. In Rome, as in Greece, as

the laws were made more just to woman, her moral and social degradation was intensified. There is nothing sadder in human history than the condition of women during the decline of the Roman state. A depravity of which it is impossible to speak without becoming indelicate, grew like a leprosy into the lives of women of every class, until, as Plutarch says, they seemed to have been born only for luxury and sensuality. Asiatic slaves of surpassing beauty were introduced into every patrician house, and Roman matrons, throwing aside even the appearance of decency, delivered themselves up to the most revolting vice. Seneca says, "They vied with men in licentiousness." There was a universal aversion to marriage, and a weariness of life itself. The Roman Empire had become a slough of blood and filth.

If we turn to the barbarous populations from which the modern Christian nations have been developed, we find no marked change for the better in the condition of woman. Certain authors, in their zeal to deny all beneficent influence to the Christian religion, have sought to make it appear that the present position of women in the civilized world is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to the reverence in which it is supposed woman was held by the Teutonic tribes that on the downfall of the Roman Empire gained control of a large part of Europe. They form this opinion upon information derived from Tacitus, who, in his account of the manners and customs of the Germans, says :

"They think there is in women something holy and prophetic; they do not despise their counsels, and they listen to their predictions. In the time of the divine Vespasian we have seen the greater part of them regard Velleda as a goddess."

But Tacitus here alludes manifestly to a superstitious belief in woman as a sorceress and prophetess, and any conclusions that we may attempt to draw from his words as to woman's social position among these barbarous tribes, must be valueless. Similar beliefs and analogous customs, as Guizot has remarked, have existed among many savage and barbarous peoples. Tacitus, indeed, expressly says in another passage, that the authority of Velleda was due to a superstition among the Germans that led them to look upon many women as prophetesses; and the witchcraft of the Middle Ages, and even that of New England, at a later day, for which Christianity has been held accountable,

was the survival of an ancient pagan superstition, which it required centuries to erase from the popular imagination. It must be borne in mind, too, that Tacitus had never crossed the Rhine, and that his knowledge of the social customs of the barbarians was derived from others, whose accounts may or may not have been trustworthy. Again, Tacitus wrote in the mephitic air of Roman corruption, and the indignation with which the moral degradation of his countrymen filled him must have led him to paint in brighter colors the life of barbarians who could not have been as depraved as the civilized men whom he knew. We know, at all events, that the lot of woman among the Teutonic tribes was what it has always been among barbarous peoples. The slayer of a woman capable of bearing children was made to pay a fine of about six dollars; if she was too young or too old to become a mother, the fine was put at two dollars. It is the old Greek view, in which woman is valuable because without her it is not possible to have man. The husband bought his wife, and if she became unfaithful he drove her with rods through the village in a state of nudity. The sentiment of modesty and holy shame, which is so essential a part of Christian reverence for woman, could hardly have existed among these populations, since we know, from Tacitus, that custom permitted the men and women to bathe promiscuously. Polygamy was conceded in principle, since kings and nobles were permitted to have several wives. "A slave," says Strabo, "woman was compelled to toil for her husband during his life, and at his death she was immolated on his grave, that she might continue to serve him in another world." Among the other barbarous peoples of Europe, woman's lot was still more deplorable. Cæsar's account of the tribes that inhabited England gives us an insight into a state of depravity to which history can hardly furnish a parallel.

It is not difficult to account for this world-wide inhumanity of man to woman. Throughout all pre-Christian history the law of superior strength was the rule of conduct. The strongest governed, and governed in virtue of their strength, and not in virtue of any moral sanction or divine authority —

"The good old plan
That he should take who has the power,
And he should keep who can."

This is at all times true of savage and barbarous hordes; and it is, in a general way, true of the pagan states of Greece and

Rome. The notion that man has duties to his fellow-man, even though he be wholly in his power, did not enter into the view of human life. Captives, therefore, might be put to death, or reduced to a state of slavery worse than death. The slave was a chattel; the master was free to treat him as he treated his ass or his dog. Among pagans, the later stoics were the first to teach that masters are bound by ties of moral obligation to their slaves, and how far these views may have been the result of Christian influences, it is not easy to determine. When strength is made the measure of right, woman is inevitably driven to the wall. Nature, in making her a mother, makes her weak—takes a part of her blood, her mind, and her heart to give it to another. Child-bearing and child-rearing place her at a disadvantage. Were she even physically stronger and mentally more capable than man, the infirmities and the duties inseparable from her sex would make it impossible for her to cope with him in the life-struggle. Hence, wherever the law of strength has been accepted as the rule of life, man has treated woman as Petruchio proposed to treat Katherina :

“ I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.”

The savage went wife-hunting, as he went wolf or bear hunting, and brought the captive home to be his slave. The barbarian, too, captured his woman in war, or bought her. The civilized pagan was a polygamist, or at least looked upon himself as wholly free from all obligations of marital fidelity.

If this be, in general outlines, the history of woman except in Christendom, it is pertinent to ask whether the Christian religion bears any causal relation to her actual position in the civilized world. When Christ came, woman, like the slave, was everywhere without honor, without freedom, without hope. Men, bearing the curse of their own depravity, sank into the depths of moral infamy to which they had reduced the poor and the weak. Surrounded by human herds to whom vice in its most degrading forms had become a second nature, they breathed an atmosphere of corruption, in which the moral sense perished. Life grew to be a kind of remittent fever alternating between lust and blood. Here and there a stray voice protested, but

only in tones of despair. The masses of mankind—the slave and the woman—had been reduced to a state so pitiable that possibly nothing short of the coming of God himself, in sorrow and in weakness, could have inspired the courage even to dream of better things. Hope had fled; the world was prostrate; in the mephitic air of unnatural sensual indulgence the soul was stifled; woman had lost even the attractiveness of sex, and a thousand slaves could hardly feed the stomach of Dives. To such a world Jesus Christ came, and took Lazarus in his arms, and called upon all who believed in God to follow him in the service of outraged humanity. Before any moral progress could be hoped for, new ideas had to be grafted in the human mind, ideas as to what man is in himself, as to what is due to him in virtue of his very nature; new doctrines concerning the duties of all men to all men, and especially of the strong to the weak, of the rich to the poor, of man to woman. Christ sees the soul. The soul determines the value of human life, and the soul of the child, of the slave, of woman, is as sacred as the soul of Cæsar. “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” That which is supreme in Christ is love. He pours the boundless love of God into the channels in which human life flows. In his presence upglows the purest, the strongest, the most unquenchable love that exists or has existed on earth; and he turns this stream of divine charity into the desert of human wretchedness and woe, to refresh and gladden the hearts of the poor and the forlorn, of the slave and the beggar, and of woman, the great outcast of humanity. He sends those who love him to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to visit the sick. Wherever a human being suffers wrong or want, there is Christ to be loved and to be served. Homer is not so much the father of all our poetry, nor Socrates so much the master of all our intellectual discipline, as is Christ the fountain-head of the humanitarian love that makes men helpful to the weak and the wronged. In lifting the soul into the full light of God’s presence, he not only gave a new measure of the value of life, but a new meaning to authority. The supremacy of force is supplanted by the supremacy of truth and justice, of love and mercy. Slaves and beggars will now appeal from emperors and senates to God, in the name of the soul, redeemed by Christ.

Henceforth, to be man is to be God-like; to be an emperor, is to be human. In the light of this truth, woman becomes the equal of man. Hence polygamy is abolished, and marriage is of one with one, and for life. Wedded love becomes sacramental love, and the tenderness with which Christ loves his church, the symbol of the love of husband for wife. "He that loveth his wife," says St. Paul, "loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth his church." Thus the family becomes a lesser church, the home a sanctuary, and woman is God's providence, sitting by each man's hearth-fire. Eve withdraws, and the Virgin Mother is made the ideal woman. No Amazon here, no Spartan mother, no stern mother of the Gracchi, no goddess of sensual love, no fair slave of man's animal appetites; but woman, pure, gentle, tender, loving, patient, strong; the world's benefactress, because, through her, divine manhood lives on earth, and peace, love, mercy, and righteousness prevail. With this new ideal of womanhood, the exaltation of the beauty and moral worth of perfect chastity is intimately associated. The selfishness of man, which is chiefly shown in the indulgence of his sensual passions, is woman's most terrible enemy. Love is pure and gentle; lust is coarse and brutal. Love is born of the soul, and not of the senses; and when this celestial flower first blooms under the eyes of a pure youth and a fair maiden, they are lifted to infinite heights, and the sad side of love is the disenchantment that comes when they are awakened from their dream. Nothing tends more to exalt the passion of pure love than reverence for virginity, real belief in the sacredness of womanly virtue. They only are worthy of the love of woman who, like King Arthur's knights, bind themselves —

"To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds."

This exaltation of perfect chastity is the most emphatic assertion of the truth that woman does not exist simply for man; that the sphere of her activity is not bounded by the duties of wife and mother. She may love Jesus Christ, and, with no man for her husband, become a ministering angel of light and love to the wide world. Purity, meekness, patience, faith, and love—which are the virtues that our blessed Lord most empha-

sizes—are, above all, womanly virtues. He does not exalt in intellect, courage, and strength, but gentleness, and lovingness, and helpfulness. The Christian hero even, like all heroines, shows his supreme strength in suffering rather than in doing. To the most wretched phase even of woman's existence the Saviour has brought the healing of his heavenly grace. In all literature, sacred and profane, there is nothing so touching, so tender and consoling, as the Gospel episode of Magdalene; and he who looks with more complacency upon Aspasia with Plato at her feet than upon Magdalene at the feet of Jesus, is self-condemned. If we take a view of Christian history in the light of the ideals that Christ has given us, there is, of course, disappointment. The ideal never becomes real in this earthly existence, and since even the best reach not these heights, the multitude, of course, remain far below. Ideals are like the mountain-peaks that gleam amid the azure heavens; we look up to them with delight, but the ascent wearies, and when on the summit we find the air too fine for our coarse breathing, and in the solitude we miss the crowd and grow lonely. Nevertheless, on these snow-capped heights are born the spring showers and the summer rains, which nourish the growing corn and the ripening grain. But if Christian society has not realized its ideals concerning woman, it has never been without their elevating and refining influence. To the action of the church in the middle ages we are indebted for the monogamic family, which lies at the basis of our civilization and is the stronghold of all that is best in our social life. Had not popes and bishops withstood kings and barons when they sought to continue the polygamous practices that among the German barbarians were lawful, monogamy would have perished among the ruling classes of Europe; and with the development of popular power, had such development then been possible, woman would have fallen to the place that she to-day occupies in Mohammedan countries. Indeed, the preservation of all western Europe from the blight of Mohammedanism is due to the action of the church, which united and was alone able to unite the warring factions of western semi-barbarians, and to hurl them, century after century, against the strongholds of the hordes whose dream of heaven was a place of sensual delights.

The objection has often been urged, that in making man the head of the family the church is unjust to woman. But the family is an organic unity, and cannot exist without subordina-

tion and authority. Either the husband or the wife must be the depository of domestic authority, and unless it can be shown that woman is better fitted than man to exercise this power, no injustice has been done. Physically man is stronger than woman; he is better able to confront the world and to do the work by which the members of the family are maintained in health and comfort. Historically, society grows out of a warlike and barbarous state of life, and since women are less fitted for war than men, the defense of property and rights is naturally intrusted to those whose hands hold the sword. But it is not necessary to examine into the genesis and evolution of society to find reasons for giving the headship of the family to man; we need but look into the heart of woman to see there an impulse as strong as life to look up to and follow the man she loves. Between man and woman there ought to be no question of superiority or inferiority; they are unlike, and in nothing do they differ more than in their relative power to escape from their impressions. A woman understands only what she feels, whereas a man may grow to be able to look at things as they are in themselves, remaining the while indifferent to their relations to himself. Hence women are superior to men in those virtues in which the essential element is right feeling. They believe more, hope more, and love more than men. They are more compassionate, more capable of remaining faithful to those who are unworthy of their love, because they consider only the love they feel, and give comparatively little heed to its object. Men, on the other hand, are superior in the virtues that spring less from sentiment and depend rather on the nature of things, their eternal fitness, as justice, fortitude, equanimity, wisdom, prudence. This difference in character determines their position in domestic and social relations; nor would there be gain for either man or woman if they could be made less unlike. The charm, as well as the helpfulness, of their relations lies in their differences, and not in their likenesses. They are complementary; each needs the qualities of the other, and their wants are the bond of union. The opposition of men and women to so-called woman's rights comes, doubtless, in many instances from a belief that to throw woman into public life is to make her less womanly. Nor gods nor men love a mannish woman or a womanish man. The unfairness with which woman is treated in the legislation of the mediæval epoch may be traced to the bar-

barous ideas of woman that partially survived in Europe centuries after our ancestors had been converted to Christianity; nor has this injustice even yet disappeared from the statute-books of the civilized nations. The causes that have led to the improvement of woman's condition among the Christian nations are, in general, the same that have developed our civilization. Whatever influences have been active in the abolition of slavery, in securing popular rights, free government, protection of children and the poor, in bringing knowledge within the reach of all, and thereby spreading abroad juster and more humane principles of conduct, have also wrought for the welfare of woman; and it is not necessary to point out how intimately all this progress is associated with the social action of the Christian religion. The spirit of chivalry is the outgrowth of the Christian ideal of womanhood. To maintain that Christianity crushed out "the feminine element, and, more than all other influences combined, plunged the world into the dark ages," is to indulge in a kind of declamation that, for the past half century at least, has become impossible to enlightened minds. To say the doctrine of original sin throws the guilt exclusively or chiefly on woman, is merely to affirm one's ignorance of Christian teaching. St. Ambrose, one of the four great doctors of the Western Church, declares that woman's fault in the original fall was less than that of man, as her bearing was beyond question more generous. And then the Catholic Church at least teaches that Mary has more than made good any wrong that Eve may have done. To assert that in the Christian religion "the godhead is a trinity of males" is to be at once ignorant and coarse. God is neither male nor female, as in Christ there is neither male nor female. To proclaim that the Christian religion teaches that "woman is an afterthought in creation, sex a crime, marriage a condition of slavery for woman and defilement for man, and maternity a curse," is to mistake rant for reason, declamation for argument. In fact, the advocates of woman's rights too often take this false and therefore offensive tone. They speak like people who have grievances, and to have a grievance is to be a bore. They scold, and when women scold, whether in public or in private, men may not be able to answer them, but they grow sullen and cease to be helpful. To be persuasive, woman must be amiable; and to be strong, she must speak from a loving heart, and not from a sour mind. Whoever is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of

Christianity must sympathize with all movements having as their object the giving to woman the full possession of her rights. No law that is unjust to her should exist in Christendom. She should not be shut out from any career that offers to her the means of an honest livelihood. For the same work she should receive the same wages as a man, and should hold her property in virtue of the same right that secures to him the possession of his own. For wrong-doing of whatever kind she should not be made to suffer a severer punishment than is inflicted upon man. The world will continue to be unjust to her until public opinion makes the impure man as odious as it makes the impure woman.

The best interests of mankind, of the church and the state, will be served by widening and strengthening woman's influence. The ancient civilization perished because woman was degraded, and ours will be perpetuated by a pure, believing, self-reverent, and enlightened womanhood. Woman here in the United States is more religious, more moral, and more intelligent than man; more intelligent in the sense of greater openness to ideas, greater flexibility of mind, and a wider acquaintance with literature; and whatever is really good for her must be good for our religion and civilization. She "stays all the fair young planet in her hands."

J. L. SPALDING.